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Chairman: Mr. Sharma ..... (Nepal)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 116: Pattern of conferences (A/56/901; A/57/32 and Corr.1, A/57/228 and Add.1-2, A/57/289 and A/57/472)

1. **Mr. Namavičius** (Chairman of the Committee on Conferences), introducing the report of the Committee on Conferences for 2002 (A/57/32 and Corr.1), said that a significant portion of the work of the Committee on Conferences had been devoted to consideration of the consolidated report of the Secretary-General on improving the performance of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services (A/57/289). The Committee had commended the Secretary-General on the frank analysis of the Department's operations and welcomed the creative solutions that had been proposed as well as the Secretary-General's intention to implement without delay those measures that fell under his authority as chief administrative officer of the Organization.

2. The Committee had made specific recommendations on a number of issues, including the integration of global management; the implementation of the proposed improvements, with the advice and support of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS); the integration into the Department of the functions of the technical-servicing secretariats of the Fifth and Sixth Committees; possible alternative ways of addressing the issue of summary records; improving the current situation of late submission and issuance of documents through the implementation of a new slotting system; the development of performance indicators and the updating of current workload standards to reflect the functions performed by language staff and the impact of technological innovations; the involvement of the other major duty stations in the reforms, taking into account their specificities and operational responsibilities; the combining and utilization of existing operational systems when further developing electronic tools so as to avoid duplication; and the provision of adequate specialized information technology support for all major duty stations.

3. The Committee had noted with satisfaction that, in preparing the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 2003, the Secretariat had taken into account the arrangements concerning Orthodox Good Friday on 25 April 2003. It had requested the Secretariat to identify the source of funding for each item when issuing the draft revised calendar for 2003 and future calendars and to note clearly those treaty bodies for which exceptions had been made to be funded from the regular budget. It had also invited the Secretary-General, when drafting the biennial calendar of conferences and meetings for 2004-2005, to submit, as appropriate, proposals for avoiding peak periods at the various duty stations.

4. On the question of the utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities, the Committee had noted with deep concern that the overall utilization factor at the four duty stations in 2001 had dropped six points below the benchmark of 80 per cent. The Chairman of the Committee on Conferences had conducted consultations with the chairpersons and secretariats of bodies that had been underutilizing their resources for three years in a row and had urged them to consider changes to their programme of work, to introduce discipline in the way they conducted their business and to work more closely with conference services. The Committee had noted the explanation given by some committees that early endings of meetings could be considered a sign of efficiency and stressed that better planning and flexible adjustment of the programme of work were the best way to reduce time lost owing to late starts and early endings of meetings. It had concluded that, should there be no improvement in the utilization statistics of the most consistent underutilizers, it would consider further steps to remedy the situation and make recommendations thereon to the General Assembly.

5. With regard to changes to the methodology, the Committee considered that the utilization factor (UF) was clearly superior as an overall measurement of utilization to both the meeting ratio (MR) and the planning accuracy factor (PAF) and should thus be kept as the primary index. It had concluded, however, that further consideration should be given to the question of whether the PAF was a more meaningful index of measurement for those bodies that met virtually throughout the year and not just during the main part of the General Assembly.

6. The Committee had welcomed the efforts that had been made during the previous year to improve the utilization of conference services at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, but had expressed regret that a written report on the subject had not been made available for consideration. It had also welcomed the

marked increase in the number of events organized at the United Nations Centre at Bangkok and the further increase projected for 2002.

7. The Committee had examined requests for exceptions to section I, paragraph 7, of General Assembly resolution 40/243 and had recommended to the General Assembly that it should explicitly authorize seven bodies to meet in New York during the main part of its fifty-seventh session. It had also requested the Secretariat to communicate to those bodies with particularly low utilization rates their past utilization figures so as to impress upon them the need to avoid wastage of conference services.

8. With respect to documentation- and publication-related matters, the Committee had taken note of the corrective measures that had been taken by the Secretary-General with regard to making documents available on United Nations web sites before they had been distributed simultaneously in all official languages. It had welcomed the stated intention of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) to increase the percentage of documents available in Arabic from 47 per cent in 2000-2001 to 80 per cent in 2002-2003 and 100 per cent in 2004-2005.

9. With regard to translation- and interpretation-related matters, the Committee had noted that it was likely that in two or three years the remaining technical problems of remote interpretation would be solved and it looked forward to the results of the comprehensive cost-benefit analysis on the use of remote interpretation. It had also noted with satisfaction the results of the first training exercise for interpreters with desired language combinations, which had taken place in 2001, and supported the continuation of the initiative in a flexible manner and from within existing resources.

10. Lastly, the Committee had stressed that information technology was essential to achieving integrated global management of conference services and had requested the Secretariat to ensure that the Department's projects dovetailed with the overall strategy of the Organization and were compatible with the capital master plan. Priority should be given to projects that had the potential for improving department-wide productivity without sacrificing quality. The Secretariat should also study the relative merits of the document tracking systems currently in use in the different duty stations and the possibility of combining the best features of each. In view of the improvements in the technology, it should also make more extensive use of videoconferencing in meetings in order to increase the contact between intergovernmental bodies and Secretariat officials posted away from Headquarters, while achieving cost savings.

11. **Mr. Chen** Jian (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management), introducing the reports of the Secretary-General on pattern of conferences (A/57/228 and Add.1-2), improving the performance of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services (A/57/289), and the status of recruitment for the Interpretation Section at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/56/901), said that it should come as no surprise that the Department had now undertaken to revamp its performance, since Member States had been calling on the Department year after year to examine its operations with a view to making them more efficient and cost-effective.

12. First, there would be a major change in the Department's philosophy, since it was obvious that it could not solve the problems with the same mentality that had led to their creation in the first place. The Department had behaved well as a passive service provider, but only at great cost and in an unsustainable way. Like the rest of the Secretariat, the Department was therefore moving away from providing services on demand to managing events within its available resources. It would assume a more proactive role, staying on top of and not at the mercy of events. Greater emphasis would be placed on advance planning in order to put an end to the hit-or-miss game of meeting servicing requirements.

13. Drastic changes were proposed in the Department's internal modus operandi in order to focus on full-system benefits. The documentation chain and the meetings chain, two main components of the Department's activities, had been thoroughly examined and subprogrammes of marginal value had been identified with a view to redeploy resources to where they could produce greater system-wide impact. It had been decided to strengthen pre-editing, for example, so that translators could work on well-edited material and thereby produce work of better quality with less wastage of resources. Since the rationalization of requests for meetings had resulted in a more efficient

use of resources, it was proposed that a similar degree of predictability should be introduced in documentation, a source of perennial concern to Member States. Upstream planning would be improved to ensure that documents were submitted on time, that their quality was enhanced and that page limits were observed. Downstream processing capacity would also be adjusted to match requests for the Department's services.

14. The Department was aware of the concerns that had been expressed about the quality of translation and interpretation services and intended to take a number of measures to ensure that quality remained the underlying consideration in the work of the Department. Quality control mechanisms and training and recruitment procedures would be reviewed with a view to their improvement.

15. The Department had also stepped up efforts to consolidate its global reach and to make the most cost-effective use of the finite resources available worldwide. The institutional relationship between the Department and the other three duty stations would be made more uniform and effective. Concerted advance planning between various duty stations would also be enhanced in order to achieve a better synchronization of the peaks and valleys of meetings. All of that would be done in the spirit of centralization at the policy level and decentralization at the operational level.

16. Technology was the linchpin of all that the Department intended to accomplish. Technology could make the Department more efficient through the complete electronic documents processing chain and more cost-effective through printing on demand. The Department was currently working on a strategy for phased development of the projects envisaged in the reports. A number of projects that could produce immediate results were already under way, including the new Journal with its hyper-link capability and large wall displays for the transmission of meeting information.

17. The objective of the Department's efforts was not budget-cutting but improved performance. The staff that might be affected by restructuring would be offered the necessary training for redeployment to areas in which they could play a more productive role. The Department's promising ideas must now be translated into tangible results through a comprehensive implementation strategy at the policy and operational levels and with the support of all Member States.

18. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the related report of the Advisory Committee (A/57/472), said that the report of the Secretary-General on improving the performance of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services (A/57/289) contained many commendable proposals and the Advisory Committee's comments were meant to facilitate the implementation of those proposals.

19. With regard to the utilization of conference-servicing resources, the Advisory Committee was of the opinion that the statistics for utilization, the conclusions arrived at using those statistics and the action taken in response should take into account the specific situations that governed the work of some of the bodies in the underutilization category (para. 2).

20. In paragraph 6 of its report, the Advisory Committee called for a pragmatic approach to the implementation of the Secretary-General's proposals regarding requests for informal consultations and extension of meetings. Inflexibility during the implementation process could lead to difficulties and unnecessary misunderstanding.

21. In paragraph 7 of its report, the Committee supported the goal of integrated global management, but cautioned against a situation in which the Department might become a remote supervisor of operations at duty stations away from Headquarters. The concept of delegation of authority should not be compromised. The objective should be for the Department to centralize general policy setting and formulation of standards and guidelines while delegating full responsibility and accountability for day-to-day operational activities, including management of budgetary and staff resources. To that end, full involvement of the overseas duty stations and the related legislative machinery was essential for the success of the proposed reforms.

22. The Advisory Committee welcomed the proposals for upstream planning for a more orderly processing of documentation and reports. During the implementation of those measures, a systematic analysis of delays in the submission of reports and parliamentary documentation should be undertaken in order to make necessary changes to improve upstream planning in the

light of experience. In that connection, the Committee welcomed the Secretariat's intention to initiate a system-wide review of meeting schedules and saw merit in the involvement of Member States in the exercise.

23. The Advisory Committee had regularly commented in the past on the problems of language services and had highlighted in its latest report the significant deterioration in the quality of translation in some languages. In paragraph 12, it recommended a renewed commitment to training for both translators and interpreters and the use of national translation and interpretation institutions for such training.

24. The Advisory Committee's comments on technological innovations were contained in paragraph 19 of its report. More progress could be achieved if more investments were made in new technologies and appropriate assistance was provided to missions that lacked the capacity to receive and print electronic documents.

25. Lastly, the successful implementation of the proposals contained in document A/57/289 required a continuous and effective dialogue among all units of the Secretariat and between the Secretariat and Member States.

26. **Mr. Christiansen** (Denmark), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the associated countries Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey, and, in addition, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, said that the work of intergovernmental organs and expert bodies of the United Nations required high-quality meeting and documentation services. The international character of the United Nations, with its need to ensure the equal treatment of all official languages — a matter of high priority for the European Union — presented a challenge to the providers of those services. The Department of General Assembly and Conference Management was the main functional authority for conference services and should ensure close coordination, bearing in mind the responsibility of each duty station for operational activities, in order to achieve maximum cost-effectiveness while maintaining the required standards. The European Union proposed that the Committee should take note of the report of the Secretary-General on improving the performance of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services (A/57/289) and of the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences, in the expectation that if the Department took the action proposed it would be a more responsive, productive, efficient and useful partner to the Member States and the Organization.

27. The Secretary-General and the Committee on Conferences should play a more active role in preventing peaks when the draft calendar of conferences and meetings for 2004 and 2005 was prepared. Like the Committee on Conferences, the European Union was concerned that 307 meetings, or 921 hours, had remained unutilized in 2001. It commended the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences for holding consultations with the chairpersons of the bodies which had underutilized their resources for more than three years in a row. Those bodies should reconsider their programmes of work and introduce greater discipline, in order to reduce waste. That was a matter of ensuring sound and efficient use of the financial resources of the Organization, and should therefore be given the highest priority.

28. **Ms. Nakian** (United States of America) said that, as a member of the Committee on Conferences, her delegation had thoroughly reviewed the reports of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/57/228 and Add. 1 and Add. 2) and on improving the performance of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services (A/57/289), and the report of the Committee on Conferences for 2002 (A/57/32). It welcomed the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/57/289, particularly the proposed measures to alleviate the delays in issuing documentation through advance planning, a slotting system for processing reports, the enforcement of page limits, and consideration of alternative means (such as digital recordings) to eliminate summary records. It strongly supported the request of the Committee on Conferences for the Secretary-General to submit a report on the problem of summary records to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. It was important to optimize the use of technology. The Secretary-General should, however, ensure that information technology projects were incorporated into the overall strategy of the Organization and were fully compatible with the Capital Master Plan.

29. Her delegation agreed with the conclusion of the Committee on Conferences that workload standards by themselves could not adequately assess the functions performed by translators, interpreters and text processors, but that they were important to assess productivity. It would like the Secretary-General to develop performance indicators that could better evaluate the quality of language services. It also shared the views of the Committee on Conferences and the European Union on avoiding peaks in the calendar of conferences and on the underutilization of resources through late starts, early conclusion and cancellation of meetings in 2001, and called for better planning to improve the situation. In the same spirit, it welcomed the Secretary-General's goal of reducing the number of meetings, which currently stood at over 15,000 a year, and looked forward to specific proposals on how that goal could be accomplished. According to Article 17 of the Charter, only the expenses of the Organization should be borne by its Member States; it was the responsibility of States parties to provide financial support for the treaty bodies of which they were members. Her delegation would therefore like the calendar of conferences to include details of the source of funding for each item and indicate the treaty bodies for which exceptions had been made to allow them to draw on the regular budget of the Organization. In that connection, it welcomed the issuance of a corrigendum to the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/57/32/Corr.1), which added references to the treaty bodies to the calendar. In order to allow proper review by the appropriate legislative bodies, she asked that decisions and recommendations adopted at the 2002 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council should be identified in the draft calendar of conferences.

30. **Mr. Herrera** (Mexico) referred to the statement made by his delegation, on behalf of Spanish-speaking countries, at the Committee's 1st meeting concerning the status of Spanish among the official languages of the United Nations.

Agenda item 114: Improving the financial situation of the United Nations

31. **Mr. Connor** (Under-Secretary-General for Management) said that, over the previous six months, additional funds amounting to $59.4 million had been earmarked for improvements in Headquarters infrastructure, in view of the need to enhance security for United Nations staff and premises. Progress had also been made in the provision of on-line management information to programme managers, the development of a comprehensive design plan for renovating Headquarters, the approval of human resources reform, and the extension of the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) to peacekeeping missions. Over the next six months, several initiatives were ready for implementation, including systems for tracking the progress of potential productivity gains, the transfer of archive records to a digital format, and the completion of an electronic document publishing and handling system for the United Nations Treaty Series.

32. While 2001 had been a good financial year, the forecast for 2002 remained uncertain. There were four yardsticks by which to assess the financial situation of the United Nations: unpaid assessments, cash on hand, debt to Member States and the capacity of the budget to respond to the mandates given to the Organization by Member States.

33. Regarding assessments, the data currently available reflected the situation as of 30 September 2002. Aggregate assessment levels comprised amounts applicable to the regular budget, the international tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, and peacekeeping. The regular budget had remained almost constant for a number of years, thanks to cost savings and favourable exchange rates. Tribunal assessment levels had risen steadily since their inception, and further increases were predicted, owing to the approval of ad litem judges for the International Tribunal for Rwanda, and the long-term financial implications of sentence enforcement. The overall picture for peacekeeping missions was less predictable, but major increases were foreseen for two African missions, the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) and the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), while decreases were expected for most of the other ongoing operations.

34. The cash situation under the regular budget was critical, owing to the slow payment or non-payment of assessments. As of 30 September, only 105 Member States had paid their regular budget assessment in full, in contrast to more favourable statistics in previous years. A total of 84 Member States had failed to meet their financial commitments under the regular budget, of which 39 had failed to make any payment at all in 2002. That alarming trend threatened to undermine the

ability of the Organization to carry out its work. The leading culprits were the United States of America and Brazil, which owed $446 million and $44 million, respectively. The United States Congress had, however, recently adopted a resolution to pay off a significant proportion of its debt; a first instalment of $47 million had been paid on 9 October and a second instalment of $208 million was expected by the end of October

35. The situation of unpaid assessments was even more serious for the international tribunals; only 56 Member States had honoured their commitments in full. As for peacekeeping operations, the problem of outstanding assessments restricted the ability of the Organization to pay for troops and contingent-owned equipment. He commended those countries that had honoured all of their financial commitments, namely Angola, Australia, Canada, Finland, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, New Zealand and South Africa.

36. The regular budget cash balance was running a slight deficit and, while the projected contribution from the United States should ensure that it reached zero by the end of the year, the situation remained critical. Periodic shortages of regular budget cash had required borrowing from peacekeeping cash at various times throughout the year. Tribunal cash was sufficient to fund all planned activities, in contrast to the more tenuous situation at the beginning of the year, and a cash level of $10 million was predicted for the end of the year. While peacekeeping cash levels had fluctuated widely since the end of 2001, generally speaking, the situation was an improvement on that of a year earlier, with a projected surplus of $1,361 million.

37. Despite a relative improvement in combined year-end cash levels, the position was more tenuous than it appeared, owing to restrictions on the use of peacekeeping cash for cross-borrowing. Cash on hand for active missions was needed to provide for the operational requirements of the five large peacekeeping missions, and the peacekeeping reserve fund could be used solely for new or expanded missions. The dwindling cash for closed missions was the only source for cross-borrowing and, when that ran out, the Organization would be unable to meet its obligations for troops and contingent-owned equipment. That would be a major reversal following the hard work that had been done to overcome such problems in the past.

38. The United Nations remained in debt to Member States as a result of amounts owed for troops and contingent-owned equipment. Of the $748 million owed at the beginning of the year, $629 million would be paid to Member States by the end of 2002. Although that fell short of the target set by the Secretary-General of paying for all obligations in the year in which they were incurred, it represented an improvement over the situation in 2001. Delays in reimbursements, however, threatened to hinder progress over the coming months.

39. The Organization depended on the prompt payment of assessments to maintain its financial viability. As of the end of 2001, unpaid assessments had been down, cash had increased and debt had decreased. 2001 had been counted as a good year. Despite higher unpaid assessments and debt to Member States, 2002 would still be considered a good year, thanks to the recent decision by the United States authorities to honour many of its outstanding commitments. As well as making arrears payments of $712 million over the past three years, the United States had removed an upper limit of 25 per cent on peacekeeping contributions for the years 2001 to 2004, a limit which had restricted its payments in the past. Moreover, it would, in future, synchronize its payment of assessments in order to resume payment of dues at the beginning of each year. That would obviate the need for the Organization to cross-borrow to offset the late payment of regular budget assessments.

40. He expressed concern over the growing disparity between budgetary appropriations and the mandates of the Organization. Over the past 10 years, the overall budget had remained more or less constant, absorbing higher costs, including inflation and unforeseen expenditure linked to peace and security. That had been achieved thanks to efficiency gains and favourable currency rates. Nevertheless, staying within the appropriation level for the biennium 2002-2003 remained a significant challenge and the Organization had been forced to curtail meetings, reduce its utility use and limit any further information technology upgrades.

41. New measures had been approved, and others were anticipated, which would push the overall budget up from its current level of $2,625 million to its highest ever level of approximately $2,930 million. Nine items constituted the aggregate package: special political missions ($114.7 million), security improvements for Headquarters ($59.4 million), exchange rate

fluctuations ($49 million), International Civil Service Commission recommendations ($29.7 million), the Capital Master Plan ($22.5 million), unforeseen and extraordinary expenses ($12 million), funding to offset low vacancy rates ($8 million), conference and support services for the Counter-Terrorism Committee ($7.5 million), and other financial implications ($1.5 million). Collectively, the aggregate increase of $300 million could not be absorbed within the current capacity of the regular budget.

42. The funding of special political missions required special attention, since it represented the largest individual increase of all new items. The total budget provision for biennium 2002-2003 for special political missions would reach $213 million, representing approximately 8 per cent of the regular budget, and there were no indications that such missions would become less frequent over the next biennium. The Secretary-General, in presenting his budget outline for the biennium 2004-2005, had asked the General Assembly to consider whether special political missions were in fact susceptible for inclusion within the regular budget procedures. He urged the Committee to consider that matter very carefully, having regard for the need to re-establish a balance between budgetary appropriations and the mandates given to the United Nations. Lastly, as the Secretary-General had stated in his latest reform plan, much had already been achieved, but more could be done to enhance the financial management of the Organization.

Agenda item 112: Programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 (*continued*)

Decentralized budgetary and financial arrangements for central services (A/57/7/Add.3 and A/57/348)

Cooperation between headquarters departments and regional commissions (A/57/7/Add.3 and A/57/361; E/2002/15 and Add.1, 2 and 3 and Corr.1)

Delivery of advisory services (A/57/7/Add.3 and A/57/363)

Trends in extrabudgetary resources at the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the impact on its capacity to carry out the programme of work (A/57/7/Add.3 and A/57/364)

Plan to increase the regular budget component of the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/57/7/Add.3 and A/57/362)

Strengthening the Department of Public Information, within the existing capacity, in order to support and enhance the United Nations web site in all official languages of the Organization (A/57/7/Add.2 and A/57/355)

Agenda item 111: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations (*continued*)

Common services (A/57/7/Add.3 and A/57/176)

43. **Mr. Sach** (Director of the Programme Planning and Budget Division) introduced the report of the Secretary-General on decentralized budgetary and financial arrangements for central services (A/57/348), the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening the Department of Public Information, within the existing capacity, in order to support and enhance the United Nations web site in all official languages of the Organization (A/57/355), the note by the Secretary-General on cooperation between headquarters departments and regional commissions (A/57/361), the report of the Secretary-General on the plan to increase the regular budget component of the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/57/362), the report of the Secretary-General on the delivery of advisory services (A/57/363) and the report of the Secretary-General on trends in extrabudgetary resources at the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the impact on its capacity to carry out the programme of work (A/57/364).

44. The report contained in document A/57/348 had been submitted pursuant to paragraph 37 of General Assembly resolution 56/253, in which the Secretary-General had been requested to study the possibility of introducing a practice whereby user departments within the United Nations Secretariat would be responsible from their own budgets for the consumption and payment of those central services currently borne centrally under section 27 (Management and Central Support Services) of the regular budget. In fact, arrangements for charging users for services provided centrally had existed since the early 1980s. The services covered included long distance telephone services, replacement and servicing of office

automation equipment, use of the International Computing Centre and, more recently, additional telecommunications services. There were also well-established cost recovery procedures in respect of services provided to United Nations funds and programmes. In considering opportunities for expanding such arrangements, it was necessary to bear in mind the need to maintain an operating reserve and the administrative load of establishing separate charge-back systems. The current arrangements were working well. The Secretariat therefore intended to keep the issue of decentralized budgeting arrangements for central services under review and to introduce further use of the modality only to the extent that it was consistent with best practices and optimal use of the Organization's limited resources.

45. Turning to the note by the Secretary-General contained in document A/57/361, he recalled that the General Assembly, in paragraph 69 of its resolution 56/253, had requested the Secretary-General to further enhance cooperation between relevant headquarters departments and regional commissions in order to ensure the quality of output and services to Member States and address the duplication and overlap of services, where they existed. The issue had been addressed in the report of the Secretary-General to the Economic and Social Council on regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields (E/2002/15 and Add.1, 2 and 3 and E/2002/15/Corr.1) and, more broadly, in paragraphs 114 and 115 and 128 to 130 of the report of the Secretary-General on the strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change (A/57/387).

46. The report contained in document A/57/363 had been prepared pursuant to paragraph 94 of General Assembly resolution 56/253, in which the Secretary-General had been requested to consider, with respect to the delivery of advisory services to Member States, avoiding duplication and achieving optimum and effective use of resources. The report reviewed the purpose and scope of advisory services, the criteria for the selection of beneficiaries, the types of advisory services offered, and the coordination of those services at the intergovernmental and Secretariat levels. Advisory services were provided by the United Nations departments and entities listed in paragraph 4 of the report. In order to avoid duplication, it was essential to have effective coordination of their activities. At the intergovernmental level, guidance was provided by the Economic and Social Council, particularly in the resolutions and decisions emanating from the operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation segment. The guidance provided in relation to the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and the resident coordinator system was especially relevant to the conduct of advisory services. At the executive level, coordination was effected by the United Nations Development Group and the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs, which ensured, inter alia, that duplication was avoided and responsibilities were clearly defined in such broad, multidisciplinary areas as poverty eradication. Concerning resource use, it was important to recall that the provision of advisory services was not a stand-alone activity, but was firmly embedded in the respective programmes of the medium-term plan managed by the various departments and entities, which responded to requests for advisory services from governments within their areas of competence. Information on the procedures employed to ensure optimum and effective use of resources was provided in section III of the report. Additional reports on the delivery of advisory services were currently under consideration by the Second Committee and had been reviewed by the Economic and Social Council.

47. Regarding the report contained in document A/57/364, he recalled that the General Assembly, in paragraph 121 of its resolution 56/253, had requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its fifty-seventh session concrete proposals to address the impact of declining extrabudgetary resources for the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Notwithstanding the Assembly's request, the relevant data showed that there had, in fact, been a steady increase in ECLAC extrabudgetary expenditure over the past three bienniums. The perception that extrabudgetary resources were declining had arisen because of comparisons made between the actual extrabudgetary expenditure in the bienniums 1996-1997, 1998-1999 and 2000-2001 and the initial estimates for the biennium 2002-2003. The variation could be explained by the inherent uncertainty involved in making projections. As stated in paragraph 13 of the report, there were a number of restrictions on the expansion of the Commission's extrabudgetary resources; the situation would be kept under review. The Secretariat would also review the modalities for estimating the levels of extrabudgetary resources.

48. With regard to the report contained in document A/57/362, he recalled that the General Assembly in paragraph 101 of its resolution 52/220, had requested the Secretary-General to bring the financial arrangements of the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON) into line with those of similar United Nations administrative offices. Efforts had been made in the bienniums 1998-1999, 2000-2001 and 2002-2003 to strengthen the Office by gradually increasing its regular budget component and decreasing its reliance on extrabudgetary resources. In addition, strong conference services had been established at UNON. The Secretary-General was committed to increasing further the Office's regular budget resources. The report of the Secretary-General on the outline of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 (A/57/85) mentioned that resources were foreseen to strengthen UNON. Specific budgetary proposals consistent with that intention would be submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session, subject to its approval of the necessary level of resources at its fifty-seventh session.

49. Lastly, he recalled that the General Assembly, in paragraph 145 of its resolution 56/253, had requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its fifty-seventh session concrete proposals on strengthening the Department of Public Information within the existing capacity in order to support and enhance the United Nations web site in all the official languages of the Organization. The report contained in document A/57/355 addressed the financial implications of that request. The Department's role in relation to the web site was to provide coordination between the various content-providing departments so as to ensure consistency of information and adherence to established guidelines and to reduce duplication of effort. There had been no budgetary provisions for the start-up of the web site in 1995. The Department had developed and maintained it by redeploying resources from other programmes. However, the current resource capacity was barely at maintenance level. In order to ensure the continued development, maintenance and enrichment of the web site in all the official languages, additional resources would be required in the amount of $1.3 million. Those resources would provide, inter alia, for the establishment of eight new Professional posts and six General Service posts in the Web-site Section of the Department, the purchase of equipment and services and the rental of office space, as outlined in the annex to the report. The resource requirements just cited pertained only to the Department of Public Information and did not take account of the related infrastructure support requirements of the Information Technology Services Division of the Department of Management or the costs of providing content in other languages. Those requirements would have to be addressed in the future.

50. **Mr. Niwa** (Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on common services (A/57/176), said that it provided a summary of ongoing efforts and achievements in the areas of common services since the issuance of the previous report on the issue (A/55/461). The Task Force on Common Services, which he chaired in his capacity as Executive Coordinator for Common Services and which was composed of senior representatives of the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services, as well as representatives of the World Food Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, who participated as observers, continued to function effectively as a vehicle for inter-agency cooperation. It had proven to be a useful forum for discussing issues relating to joint operational activities and for the development of innovative initiatives.

51. Over the past five years, the Task Force had focused its efforts on those common services that would be of benefit and value to the participating organizations. The digital archives project was now a priority for New York-based United Nations organizations, particularly in the wake of the events of 11 September 2001. The first phase of the project had been completed, and a project manager had been appointed to oversee the implementation of phases 2 and 3 under the auspices of the Working Group on Archives and Records Management. An inter-agency procurement portal had been developed by the procurement working group to provide a single window for commercial suppliers to have access to the individual procurement web sites of participating organizations and agencies. The working group was currently finalizing lead-agency procurement arrangements among four United Nations organizations, as well as developing a professionally certified inter-agency procurement training programme

in cooperation with the United Nations Staff College in Turin, Italy. The working group for travel and transport services was exploring pilot initiatives in the area of travel management and participating in the conclusion of a global freight forwarding contract that would be made available to other United Nations organizations.

52. He noted with satisfaction that the common services initiative had led to the establishment of two inter-agency networks, namely, the Inter-Agency Network of Facilities Managers and the United Nations Security and Safety Services Network. Both networks had recently set up inter-agency web sites, which served as forums on technical issues involving not only Headquarters and offices away from Headquarters, but also the funds and programmes, specialized agencies, and international and regional financial institutions. The technical and advisory support provided by the Task Force to the United Nations Development Group had been instrumental in the completion of the pilot phase of its common services plan; that support had now been extended to the global roll-out. He was pleased to note that the common services approach in New York had been emulated in Geneva and Nairobi with the establishment of inter-agency management task forces and technical working groups.

53. Implementation of the common services initiative, which had been launched under the Secretary-General's track II reform programme in 1997, was expected to be completed by mid-2003. However, the work initiated under the programme would continue and the Task Force would meet periodically to observe the progress made in the area of common services. The new reform programme of the Secretary-General, as set out in document A/57/387, called for continuing efforts towards harmonization and integration at all operational levels. In that context, the Task Force would explore the possibility of consolidating its common services endeavours with those currently carried out by the United Nations Development Group Management Group, under a single coordination body. Such an approach would ensure a renewed and broader commitment to the pursuit of common services and harmonization of the operational policies and procedures of the United Nations organizations concerned. It would also facilitate further collaboration with the specialized agencies and international financial institutions.

54. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) introduced the related reports of the Advisory Committee (A/57/7/Add.2 and 3). The report in document A/57/7/Add.3 dealt with the reports of the Secretary-General contained in documents A/57/362, A/57/176, A/57/364, A/57/363 and A/57/348 and the note by the Secretary-General in document A/57/361. The Advisory Committee would refer to the content of the report of the Secretary-General on the plan to increase the regular budget component of the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/57/362) as appropriate, when it considered the proposed programme budget outline for the biennium 2004-2005.

55. The Advisory Committee's report in document A/57/7/Add.2 dealt with the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening the Department of Public Information, within the existing capacity, in order to support and enhance the United Nations web site in all official languages of the Organization (A/57/355). The Secretary-General was requesting additional resources in the amount of $1.3 million in order to finance the activities outlined in the report. The Department had presented two concrete cost options designed to achieve the desired parity among the official languages; the proposal under consideration was in line with the second of those options (A/57/355, para. 9). The Advisory Committee, having reviewed the Secretary-General's proposal, which would entail the establishment of 14 new posts, recommended in paragraph 8 of its report, that, in view of the ongoing review of the Department of Public Information and the consideration by the General Assembly of the proposals contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change (A/57/387), the Secretary-General should proceed to implement his proposal on the web site and report on the budgetary requirements, if any, in the context of the second performance report for the biennium 2002-2003.

56. **Ms. Chebomul** (Kenya) expressed appreciation for the measures taken to strengthen the capacity and increase utilization of the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON). The steady rise in capacity utilization at UNON, notwithstanding the serious challenges posed by inadequate resources, was a clear testament to the viability of Nairobi as an important venue for international conferences and a global centre for programmes, for both the United Nations and other intergovernmental bodies. The efforts to increase the regular budget component of

UNON, while welcome, had not gone far enough. The real growth proposed for the Office had increased by 15.2 per cent in the biennium 2000-2001, but by only 9.7 per cent in 2002-2003. She trusted that the programme budget proposal for 2004-2005 would address that inconsistency and that UNON would be provided with adequate, predictable and sustained financial resources. Serious consideration should also be given to increasing the regular budget components of the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme and reducing their reliance on unpredictable extrabudgetary resources to undertake most of their core activities, particularly since the latter was now a full-fledged programme.

57. **Mr. Christiansen** (Denmark), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the associated countries Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey, and, in addition, Iceland and Liechtenstein, and referring to the report of the Secretary-General on decentralized budgetary and financial arrangements for central service (A/57/348), said that the European Union was convinced that introducing decentralized budgetary and financial arrangements wherever practicable was the right way to encourage greater financial responsibility within the Organization. Such measures should be actively pursued.

58. The proposals regarding the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/57/362) also appeared in the report of the Secretary-General on the proposed programme budget outline for the biennium 2004-2005 (A/57/85). The European Union accordingly expected the Committee to consider budgetary proposals at the fifty-eighth session in the context of the deliberations on the programme budget for that biennium.

59. With regard to the report on the delivery of advisory services (A/57/363), only very general information on efforts to utilize resources more effectively and avoid duplication between United Nations bodies had been included. The matter deserved further consideration.

60. Regarding the report on extrabudgetary resources for ECLAC (A/57/364), which showed that the level of expenditure for technical cooperation projects in 2000-2001 had been higher than in previous bienniums, he said that the European Union agreed that the level of extrabudgetary resources available to ECLAC should be kept under review.

61. Referring to the report on cooperation between headquarters departments and regional commissions (A/57/361), he said that the European Union continued to support the establishment of a clear division of labour between headquarters departments and regional commissions. It agreed with the conclusion of the Advisory Committee that the information provided was limited, and it called for a full explanation, in the context of the programme budget outline for the biennium 2004-2005, of measures undertaken to further enhance cooperation, ensure the quality of services, prevent duplication and overlap in programme support activities and improve the efficiency of programme support activities

62. As for the proposals for strengthening the Department of Public Information to support the web site (A/57/355), the European Union attached great importance to multilingualism in the information and public relations activities of the United Nations. Efforts to expand the use of the six official languages, and other languages where possible, should continue. The report called for more resources for the Department of Public Information to ensure full parity between the official languages on the United Nations web site. The European Union was ready to discuss such a proposal, but believed that it should be seen in the wider context of the ongoing review of the Department. The Committee would be better equipped to consider the budgetary implications of that proposal at the fifty-eighth session, after the Committee on Information had held its twenty-fifth session. The Committee on Information had asked the Secretary-General to prepare additional material on the most practical and cost-effective way of proceeding with the multilingual development of the web site for consideration during that session.

63. **Mr. Wins** (Uruguay) said that ECLAC had maximized efficiency with limited resources, and had improved the quality of its reports. Many of the countries of the region were facing economic crisis, and the information in the reports was of valuable assistance in coping with that crisis. Although extrabudgetary resources had increased, there were major reports which ECLAC had been unable to produce for lack of funds. Referring to paragraph 13 of the report of the Secretary-General (A/57/364), which mentioned the significant impact which currency

devaluations were expected to have on contributions to extrabudgetary resources from Latin American and Caribbean countries in the biennium 2002-2003, he asked if the Secretariat had any projections of that impact.

64. **Mr. Díaz** (Chile) supported the comments of the representative of Uruguay and emphasized that currency devaluation had seriously affected the economies of Latin American countries and would also affect their voluntary contributions to ECLAC.

65. **Mr. Sabagh** (Syrian Arab Republic), commenting on the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening the Department of Public Information (A/57/355), said that his delegation supported all efforts, particularly those referred to in paragraph 19 of the report, to ensure that all the official languages of the United Nations were represented on the Organization's web site. That would be a modest step towards ensuring parity between the official languages. However, progress towards parity would be jeopardized by excluding press releases and treaties from translation requirements, as mentioned in paragraph 18 of the report. He wished the matter to be discussed by the Committee on Information. He also wished to point out that the Arabic versions of the reports before the Committee did not have their conclusions and recommendations in bold print.

66. **Mr. Maiga** (Mali), referring to the report on the plan to increase the regular budget component of the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/57/362), emphasized that in resolution 56/253, the General Assembly had requested the Secretary-General to provide sufficient budget resources to bring the financial operations of the United Nations Office at Nairobi into line with those of similar United Nations administrative offices, such as the Offices in Geneva and Vienna. The progress that had been made was welcome, but there was room for further improvement. Interpretation services, for example, were not on a par with those of the other Offices. Despite their efforts, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) continued to experience problems in financing administrative support. Steps should be taken to translate the commitment of the Secretary-General into tangible resources.

67. **Mr. Hao** Bin (China) said that the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening the Department of Public Information (A/57/355) provided a clear picture of the implementation by the Secretariat of the General Assembly recommendations on the development of the Organization's web site. Since the web site had been established in 1995, thanks to the efforts of the Department of Public Information, in particular, it had become a valuable source of information on the role of the United Nations for Governments, academic circles and the public. The millions of hits that the site had received were proof of its success. While congratulating the United Nations on that achievement, however, his delegation wished to express its concern at the imbalance in the use of the six official languages of the Organization. It welcomed the proposed establishment of a P-4 post for an individual responsible for coordinating the use of the official languages, but regretted that there was no Professional post earmarked for the Chinese language web site. His delegation viewed that as a necessity in the light of the dramatic increase in computer ownership and web use in China, where the number of web users was 45.8 million and growing. Many Chinese had a keen interest in United Nations affairs, so investment in the Organization's Chinese language web site would be worthwhile.

68. **Mr. Al Atrash** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that his delegation, like many others, wished to stress the importance of parity between the six United Nations official languages on the Organization's web site. Previous sessions of the Committee and previous General Assembly resolutions had discussed the issue, but progress had fallen short of expectations. His delegation hoped that concrete action would be taken to improve the United Nations web site in all the official languages, in order to make countries and individuals more aware of the activities of the Organization.

69. With regard to the plan to increase the regular budget component of the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/57/362), he emphasized that progress in providing greater resources had been slow. His delegation hoped that more active steps would be taken in the coming year to place the Office on the same footing as the Offices at Geneva and Vienna.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.